

President James Barker

London: It is June 19, 2007. We are in the Board Room of the Madren Center on the Clemson University campus and we are speaking with President James Barker.

President Barker, what is your vision for the State of South Carolina for the next decade or next two decades?

Barker: This may sound like a strange answer to a question about vision, but I think one of our challenges and one of our changes in vision we need to have is to stop referring to ourselves as a small poor state. It becomes a self-concept and our self-concept needs to be different. We have to consider the greatness within South Carolina if we want to have true vision. I think that statement which I hear much too often becomes an excuse for why we cannot achieve greatness. If we can stop thinking of ourselves that way, we really have the potential to be a great state. I would hold up as an example what Clemson University has been working on the past seven or eight years. We set out to become one of the nation's top 20 universities. Not to make an apology about anything but to say there is greatness in South Carolina and we've worked very hard to do that and we've moved from 74 to 30 on that list of public universities so certainly it can be done. I think that is an important point I would like to make. What you think about your self-concept becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy so if we see ourselves a great state we will be a great state. As long as we see ourselves as a poor state that will be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

London: How can we make this vision of 'greatness' a reality?

Barker: I would begin by saying the key issue would be education. Making sure that our education system is linked, that we don't duplicate, that we work well together, make sure that there is good communication and trust in the state about education. And to realize that more of our students need to graduate from high school, graduate from college, graduate from graduate school if we are to build a truly creative economy, an economy that is built on ideas. That is the key for South Carolina's future as I see it.

1 We have to have a standard of living that is driven by ideas and that
2 requires education. You can't just have an idea pop in your head.
3 You have to have an educational base to make that happen. I think
4 that is really critical. Quality is a key in that regard too. We cannot
5 just have an educational system. It has to be one of the best in the
6 United States. We need to have that kind of vision that we are going
7 to focus on quality. We know that there is a pent up demand for
8 quality in South Carolina. We have over 14,000 applicants for 2,800
9 freshman positions. I believe that the demand for a Clemson
10 education is built on the increase in quality that we have
11 demonstrated at Clemson and in everything that we do. If we apply
12 that lesson to all aspects of our state then I think there is some
13 tremendous opportunity and that potential that we see to be a driver
14 in the creative economy can be realized if we focus on quality. We
15 cannot settle for second best. We can't say that is good enough. We
16 have to say we are going to lead the nation in these particular areas
17 and we are ought to set out and do that. I would hold as an example
18 CU-ICAR, the International Center for Automotive Research. This
19 was a bold dangerous thing to do, to say that we are going to lead the
20 United States and maybe the world in what would be the future of
21 automotive and transportation. Who will be the people that will make
22 the innovations in safety and fuel efficiency? Who will be the people
23 that will transform what we are now driving to something very
24 different from that. I think it's going to be Clemson researchers and
25 Clemson students and BMW, Michelin, Timken engineers, architects
26 and designers working together to make that happen. That is an
27 example we should hold up and say that is what the creative
28 economy looks like. It can be done in South Carolina. Let's do it
29 again. Let's do it in specialized areas where we can lead the world.

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31 **London: Have you suggested strategies for addressing these**
32 **issues, how we continue to be leaders in SC and the world?**

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34 **Barker:** Well, the key again is attitude I think. We've seen how
35 expensive and how difficult it is to play catch up. If we let other
36 people get ahead of us, then we are scrambling to make up for lost
37 ground. If we can say we have a powerful idea that we think can
38 transform South Carolina. That's the way we ought to be thinking. It
39 has to do with our attitude and the way we look at the future. Instead
40 of scrambling and comparing ourselves to other states who are way

1 ahead of us, in selected areas we are out ahead of everyone else.
2 That should be a key strategy as we move forward. We have done
3 that in a few areas and there is no reason to think we can't do it
4 again. The General Assembly has been very farsighted against
5 starting late again, but farsighted in the sense to say that we are
6 going to make up the ground between our neighboring states with
7 things like the Life Scholarship, Palmetto Scholarships, with things
8 like Endowed Chairs Program, the Research Infrastructure bond act.
9 All of these have been about keeping the best and brightest in the
10 state. We know that it's working. We know that Life Scholarships,
11 Palmetto Scholarships, and Hope Scholarships have kept the best
12 and brightest in South Carolina. We have the numbers to prove that
13 and if we can continue to do that and give them challenging
14 opportunities for careers like CU-ICAR and like the Restoration
15 Institute so that we not only educate our best and brightest here, but
16 we also keep them here once they receive that education. I think that
17 is a critical part of what we are trying to accomplish.

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19 **London: Will the next generation of South Carolinians be better**
20 **or worse off than the current generation?**

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22 **Barker:** If I go by the students I interact with everyday and I teach a
23 class each spring so I know students from a classroom setting, from
24 student government setting, from public service, their academic
25 qualifications, the academic leadership they show, I am extremely
26 optimistic about the future. I am right at the heart of what is
27 happening there. If these young people will stay in South Carolina. If
28 we give them the opportunities to stay. If they will become leaders in
29 our state, which I believe that they will, I think we have a much
30 brighter future than any of us have a right to consider because South
31 Carolina is going to be in great shape if we are in the hands of the
32 students who are now at Clemson.

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34 **London: What responsibilities do South Carolina leaders have**
35 **to future generations of South Carolinians?**

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37 **Barker:** We have to make a commitment to quality; we have to make
38 that commitment in all sectors of what we are doing. We have to do it
39 in education, health care, government, recreation, everything that we
40 do as a common good. What we do as a people together in the state.

1 We have to say we are going to focus on quality in all these areas
2 and we have to make sure that we foster a kind of collaboration at the
3 same time. We cannot do any of this by ourselves. The research
4 universities have to work together. We have to work together—all the
5 universities, colleges, and technical colleges in the state. Then we
6 have to work collaboratively with businesses. We have to make sure
7 that we do not see any of this happening by ourselves. Any success
8 that we have as a state is a result of our collaborative efforts. Then I
9 think we have to have a plan. What has happened at Clemson has
10 not been by chance. We have not moved up 44 places in the
11 rankings as a public university just by chance. We have a specific
12 plan. We are executing that plan every year. We know where the
13 funding sources are going to be and so we are looking out over the
14 next ten years and we realize exactly what we are trying to
15 accomplish and we need that kind of statewide plan and that is an
16 effort. There are many voices we need to listen to produce such a
17 plan. We need a plan. We cannot stumble into the future. We have
18 a long-time objective and a long-term plan and if there are any
19 lessons learned from the last eight years at Clemson, I think it has
20 been that.

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22 **London:** Are there other items you would like to mention related
23 to your vision?
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25 **Barker:** Let me speak first as a University president, and then I can
26 speak a little bit as an architect. As a university president, if you boil
27 all our work down it really comes down to two things we are
28 responsible for the intellectual development of young people. We
29 have to bring out the best in them. Find the greatness within them. It
30 is there within all 17,000 of Clemson's students. There is greatness.
31 Our job is to find that greatness within them. That's part of the
32 intellectual development responsibility that we have. But the other
33 responsibility we have had as a land-grant institution from the time
34 that we were founded in 1889. The will of Thomas Green Clemson
35 makes this clear. We are also responsible for economic
36 development, so intellectual development and economic
37 development. The key for us and I think all universities is to find a
38 way to link those things together. If we just focus on one, we leave
39 the other behind. If we focus on the other, we leave the first behind.
40 We have to figure out the way in which we can link those together

1 and find activities that will strengthen both simultaneously. That is
2 why I am excited about CU-ICAR and about the Restoration Institute.
3 Because that will be intellectual development of our students and
4 economic development of our state. Now why is that possible, why is
5 that something that would fit particularly in South Carolina? We have
6 a state that is blessed with some remarkable resources. One of the
7 resources we don't realize we have is that we are coming later to this
8 task than other states and we can look around us and say what has
9 been gained and what's been lost. And the growth that we are about
10 to experience, we can either get the best of that and we can grow
11 wisely or we can grow less wise. But all we have to do is look around
12 at the states that are growing faster and sooner than we did to say we
13 don't want to do that, we'd rather do this. With that understanding and
14 insight, I would list several things we have to offer. We have a sense
15 of community in South Carolina. I am amazed at how inter-
16 connected we are regardless of race, regardless of income level; we
17 are all really one community. I know people everywhere and
18 everybody knows other people inside the state of South Carolina.
19 Even with 4 million people it feels like it's one large extended family
20 and we have the opportunity to maintain that sense of community that
21 we have. Once that is lost, as we grow rapidly without plans and
22 without careful consideration, we've lost something very special about
23 the state of South Carolina. I think we have remarkable urban areas,
24 remarkable cities in Columbia, Greenville, Charleston and others, but
25 we also have a wealth of beautiful small towns, the list is long.
26 Abbeville, Pendleton, Newberry, we have incredible places, but we
27 have to be smart about them maintaining the quality of life there and
28 the sense of place that is there. When you are in one of those
29 communities, you know where you are. You know that we're not
30 trying to be like any other place. There is an authenticity about these
31 places - about the sense of place. If we can realize that, nurture that,
32 grow and value that and treasure that, we can have something
33 remarkable. You add to that the incredible rural areas of South
34 Carolina, the farms sites, the countrysides that are here, the marshes
35 in the lower part of the state and the incredible mountains and
36 waterfalls in the upper part of the state, we have all the ingredients to
37 be the best place to live in the world. If we can maintain that sense of
38 community and that sense of place as we grow then I think we will
39 have reached the full potential of the best of what South Carolina has
40 to offer.